

**Romans (7):
God's Indictment and Dealings with Idolaters (cont.)
(Rom. 1:18-32)**

Introduction:

Today we will continue to consider the message of Romans 1:18-32 in which we read of *God's indictment and dealings with idolaters*. As we said last week regarding this passage before us, it is probably the most offensive and objectionable to the "world" in which we are living in the first quarter of the 21st century. This is because it speaks so forthrightly about God's declarations respecting the sin of homosexuality. The passage indicts a range of sins, but it is clear that homosexual behavior is an egregious form of sin that is itself a manifestation of God's judgment upon a society of intractable sinners.

Let us read the first portion of this passage: **Romans 1:18-23.**

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

It is important to remind ourselves and keep before us the purpose of this passage of Scripture within Paul's argument. He is setting forth the case of the guiltiness of the entire human race in order to show that the only way of salvation is through the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so, Paul is declaring to readers that all are under the wrath of God, and His wrath is even now seen in His dealings with people in history. **Verse 18** begins this section:

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."

God's wrath is a common theme in Scripture, but not commonly understood or embraced by people in the world. And as evangelicals we do not often help the matter. We hear much of God presented to the fallen world as a loving God, who loves everybody and is trying to bless everybody. It is not commonly proclaimed that God's wrath rests upon people; there is reluctance, even resistance to do so. But that is exactly what Paul is declaring. ***"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."***

J. I. Packer wrote about the relative little attention given to the wrath of God in the church's proclamation to the world.

The modern habit throughout the Christian church is to play this subject down. Those who still believe in the wrath of God (not all do) say little about it; perhaps they do not think much about it. To an age which has unashamedly sold itself to the gods of greed, pride, sex and self-will, the church mumbles on about God's kindness but says virtually nothing about his judgment. How often during the past year did you hear, or if you are a minister, did you preach, a sermon on the wrath of God? How long is it, I wonder, since a Christian spoke straight on this subject on radio or television, or in one of those half-column sermonettes that appear in some national dailies and magazines? (And if one did so, how long would it be before he

would be asked to speak or wrote again?) The fact is that the subject of divine wrath has become taboo and conditioned themselves never to raise the matter.

We may well ask whether this is as it should be, for the Bible behaves very differently. One cannot imagine that talk of divine judgment was ever very popular, yet the biblical writers engage in it constantly. One of the most striking things about the Bible is the vigor with which both Testaments emphasize the reality and terror of God's wrath. "A study of the concordance will show that there are more references in Scripture to the anger, fury, and wrath of God, than there are to His love and tenderness" (Arthur Pink, *The Attributes of God*).¹

The gospel that Paul set before his readers concerned the righteousness of God to save sinners from His wrath upon them. This gospel was the same for all people everywhere, for both Jews and Gentiles. But Paul needed to demonstrate that the entire world was in need of this gospel. He would first inform them of the terrible wrath that was upon them, and then he would tell them how God has provided the means to escape His wrath through the gospel. And so Paul first began to first indict the Gentiles regarding their sin and God's wrath upon them. Later in chapter 2 he showed that Jews also are sinners and need the Savior

II. Continued exposition of Romans 1:18-32

A. Paul's indictment against idolaters (1:18-23)

God's wrath is revealed "*against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.*" As we emphasized last Lord's day that *ungodliness* is the sin within the realm of one's duty before God; it is *religious* in nature. Paul shows that the manifestation of the sin of ungodliness is the sin of *idolatry*. *Unrighteousness*, is in the realm of *morality*. Paul shows that the manifestation of unrighteousness is *immorality*.² God is actively, judicially, administering justice, manifesting His wrath against "all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

God is just in the administration of His wrath, for the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men is conducted even as they "*suppress the truth*" (v. 18). Paul then explains what he meant by this idea of their suppressing the truth. **Verse 19** reads, "*For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.*" Paul declares that God had revealed knowledge about Himself to these ones who were on the receiving end of the wrath His wrath. They knew better. Their sin was against knowledge. Their guilt is great. God's wrath upon them is just.

Verse 20 records what it was that they could know about God even while in their lost condition; "*For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*" God has revealed in the things that He made and in the manner that He made them certain aspects of His nature (*natural revelation*).

Paul declares that all people everywhere have fallen from their former position of privilege and knowledge. **Verse 21** reads, "*For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.*" When Paul wrote, "although they knew God", he was not saying that they knew God in a personal and saving manner. He was saying that they had sufficient and clear knowledge that God was a transcendent almighty Creator, and that He was not to be fashioned into an image and worshipped by idolaters.

What God is saying here respecting the sin of the human race is that when people do not respond to Him in a right manner, He reveals His wrath upon them by allowing them to degrade themselves in their reasoning and in their morals. Those who fail or refuse to glorify God and thank God for who He is and for what He has done results in a judicial diminishment in one's ability to understand spiritual matters rightly and clearly. People become "futile" in their thinking. Their "foolish hearts" become darkened. Here Paul uses the term

¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1993), p. 148f.

² *Ibid.*

“heart” to describe a person’s thinking and reasoning. If they do not repent of their sin and believe the gospel, then they will continue to decline into redefining who God is in their thinking.

²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Paul declared that sin is idolatry and leads to idolatry. Idolatry may be described in several ways. First, idolatry is present when a person regards something that God made as having more value or preeminence than God who made it. Second, idolatry is present when one degrades and redefines the nature of God in order to have this “god” excuse one’s sinful thinking and behavior. Third, idolatry is present when a physical image is set up and worshipped as representing God.

We next read of...

B. God’s punishment of idolaters (1:24-32)

²⁴Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³²Though they know God’s decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Paul had declared in verse 18 that the wrath of God was being revealed in history against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. Beginning with **verse 24**, we read of the manner in which God’s wrath is revealed. God manifests His wrath upon a people in that He gives them up “in the lusts of their hearts to impurity.” God lets them have their way. I would say that here we have one manner in which God works in history subtly suggested, and another work of God in history forthrightly stated. First, what is suggested is that God commonly restrains non-Christians from sinning to the degree that they desire to sin and are capable of sinning. Secondly, what is clearly stated is that God takes away His controlling restraint upon sinners, letting them go on in their sin and into more flagrant sin.

God in His common grace restrains sin within this fallen world. In His working in providence God withholds people from sinning. A clear scriptural example of God in sovereign control of those who are strangers to Him may be seen in an event in the life of Abraham and Sarah.

¹From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar. ²And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She is my sister.” And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. ³But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, “Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man’s wife.” ⁴Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, “Lord, will you kill an innocent people? ⁵Did he not himself say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this.” ⁶Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and *it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her.* Now then, return the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will

pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.” (Gen. 20:1-7)

But when God determines to reveal His wrath “*against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*”, He gives them over to indulge their sin as a punishment for sin. Three times Paul said that “God gave them up.” (1) He gave them up to “*impurity*” (1:24). (2) He gave them up to “*dishonourable passions*” (1:26). (3) He gave them up to “*a debased mind to do what ought not to be done*” (1:28).

In every instance the giving up to sin is a result of idolatry, the refusal to make God the center and circumference of all existence, so that in practice the creature is exalted over the Creator. Hence, all individual sins are a consequence of the failure to prize and praise God as the giver of all good things.³

Let us give attention to each of these three manifestations of God’s wrath upon sinners.

(1) He gave them up to “*impurity*” (1:24).

We read in **verses 24 and 25**

²⁴Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Because these people failed to give honor to God, God gave them over to dishonorable passions to dishonor their bodies.⁴ These people that Paul described had the truth about God’s true nature. They chose, however, to exchange truth of God for a lie. Men love falsehood respecting God. They desire to know and worship a God that will confirm them in their sin.

Paul is referencing sexual sin to which God has turned these people to indulge. “The ESV uses the word “*impurity*”, to which they had been given up. It may also be translated as “*uncleanness*.”

2 Corinthians 12:21. “I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the *impurity*, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.”

Galatians 5:19. “Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, *impurity*, sensuality...”

Ephesians 5:3. “But sexual immorality and all *impurity* or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.”

Colossians 3:5. “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, *impurity*, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

1 Thessalonians 4:7. “For God has not called us for *impurity*, but in holiness.”

Here Paul’s use of this word to describe sexual sin in general. Sexual sin is dishonoring to the body; it is dishonoring to the person. There is a sense of shame, embarrassment, humiliation, that accompanies this sin when someone has indulged in it and then is discovered and published. There is a loss of dignity, a forfeiture of respect by others. There is shame.

Proverbs speaks of this dishonoring due to sexual sin. To the young man who is discovered to commit fornication with an immoral woman results in his shame and damaged reputation.

³ *The ESV Study Bible*, note on 1:24, p. 2159.

⁴ Thomas Schreiner, **Romans** (Baker Academic, 1998), p. 92.

²⁰My son, keep your father's commandment,
 and forsake not your mother's teaching.
²¹Bind them on your heart always;
 tie them around your neck.
²²When you walk, they will lead you;
 when you lie down, they will watch over you;
 and when you awake, they will talk with you.
²³For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light,
 and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life,
²⁴to preserve you from the evil woman,
 from the smooth tongue of the adulteress.
²⁵Do not desire her beauty in your heart,
 and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes;
²⁶for the price of a prostitute is only a loaf of bread,
 but a married woman hunts down a precious life.
²⁷Can a man carry fire next to his chest
 and his clothes not be burned?
²⁸Or can one walk on hot coals
 and his feet not be scorched?
²⁹So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife;
 none who touches her will go unpunished.
³⁰People do not despise a thief if he steals
 to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry,
³¹but if he is caught, he will pay sevenfold;
 he will give all the goods of his house.
³²He who commits adultery lacks sense;
 he who does it destroys himself.
³³***He will get wounds and dishonor,
 and his disgrace will not be wiped away.*** (Prov. 6:20-33)

(2) He gave them up to “*dishonourable passions*” (1:26).

²⁶For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. (Rom. 1:26-27)

Here we see the sin of homosexual sin clearly identified. This sin is the result of *dishonorable passions*.

Of course within our society a great effort has been made to normalize and dignify homosexual behavior. Our culture has now come to the place where no one can speak out against homosexual practice without being dismissed or disregarded as the worst kind of bigot. The homosexual supporters have waged an amazing campaign to change people's opinions about their behavior. They began by changing the terminology that had long been commonly associated with the behavior. They referred to themselves as “gay.” Those who practiced homosexual behavior were once known and referred to as *sodomites*. There were coarse, demeaning terms used as well, by all people in society. But that is all changed. They managed to convince society that what two consenting adults do in private is their business and does not affect anyone but them. This is a lie. For we who know Scripture know that no sin is exclusively a private matter. Others are always affected by our failures. And when a society and government come to the place they legally endorse such behavior, then that nation, that people, have crossed a threshold. That people has passed into the place in which they forfeit God's blessing and incur God's displeasure and active opposition to the well-being of that nation. **Proverbs 14:34** reads, “*Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.*”

Where is our nation at this point? One way to gauge how far we have fallen in this matter is to consider public opinion about homosexuality and in particular, public sentiment regarding gay marriage. When Vermont first passed a law to recognize “gay” unions, not gay marriage, but legal “union” status only, which went into effect on July 1, 2000, 90% of Massachusetts residents opposed the law. When Vermont passed its homosexual marriage law that went into effect on September 1, 2009, 50% of Massachusetts residents were opposed. From 90% opposed to civil union to 50% in favor of gay marriage, reflects a massive shift in public opinion regarding this matter. Here is a more official survey result:

A new poll commissioned by my organization, the National Organization for Marriage, and the Massachusetts Family Institute indicates that voters remain sharply and surprisingly divided about gay marriage. When asked, "Do you personally favor or oppose same-sex marriage generally?" 43 percent of Massachusetts voters favor same-sex marriage and 44 percent oppose it, with the remainder saying they don't know or choosing not to respond. The telephone survey of 306 people taken March 30 to March 31, 2009, is representative of voters in Massachusetts and carries a margin of error of plus or minus 5.7 percent.⁵

Here are more statistics regarding Massachusetts residents' views on gay marriage.

- The Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts ruled on November 18th, 2003 that it was unconstitutional to discriminate against gay and lesbian couples in marriage.
- On May 17th, 2004 gay and lesbian couples began legally marrying in Massachusetts. More than 1,600 gay and lesbian couples married in that first month.
- From May 17th 2004- May 2005 more than 6,000 gay couples were married in Massachusetts.
- From May 2004 to December 2004 2,123 gay male couples were married and 3,871 lesbian couples were married. 27,045 male/female couples married in the same time period.
- Lesbian couples outnumbered gay men heading to the altar 65% to 35%.
- Two towns in Massachusetts saw more same-sex marriages than heterosexual marriages since the May 2004 ruling.
- 97% of couples married in Provincetown were gay or lesbian or 841 gay and lesbian couples, compared to only 24 male/female couples.
- 275 lesbian couples and 41 gay couples were married in Northampton, compared to 189 heterosexual couples.
- Out of state couples are not allowed to legally marry in Massachusetts, although that is being challenged in the courts.
- A statewide poll by Mass Equality in May 2005 found that 62% of those Massachusetts residents polled support marriage equality for gays and lesbians.
- Fully 84% of voters believe marriage equality has either had a positive impact or no impact on the quality of life in Massachusetts.
- 82% of those surveyed said allowing gays and lesbians to marry has either had a positive impact or no impact at all on traditional marriages, contradicting one of the core arguments of opponents.
- **Political Impact:** All state legislators who support gay marriage were voted back into office in November 2004. Two gay marriage opponents lost their seats.⁶

Just in the past few weeks a public display of support of homosexual practice and marriage has been in the national news. The fast food restaurant owner, Dan Cathy, declared his opposition to homosexual marriage and his support for traditional marriage. He was repudiated by political leaders and others. I included a news article that addressed this matter.

⁵ Maggie Gallagher, “Massachusetts Gay Marriage: Five Years Later”, May 20, 2009, **Real Clear Politics**. http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2009/05/20/massachusetts_gay_marriage_five_years_later_96579.html

⁶ Kathy Belge, “Gay Marriages in Massachusetts: One Year Later, May 2005 -- Statistics and Public Opinions” on About.com, which is a lesbian on-line publication, which purports to be “Part of the New York Times Company.” <http://lesbianlife.about.com/od/wedding/a/MassOneYear.htm>

Chick-fil-A sandwiches become a political symbol

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By *BILL BARROW*

ATLANTA (AP) - All of a sudden, biting into a fried chicken sandwich has become a political statement. Chick-fil-A, the fast-food chain known for putting faith ahead of profits by closing on Sundays, is standing firm in its opposition to gay marriage after touching off a furor earlier this month. Gay rights groups have called for a boycott, the Jim Henson Co. pulled its Muppet toys from kids' meals, and politicians in Boston and Chicago told the chain it is not welcome there. Across the Bible Belt, where most of the 1,600 restaurants are situated, Christian conservatives have thrown their support behind the Atlanta-based company, promising to buy chicken sandwiches and waffle fries next week on "Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day." The latest skirmish in the nation's culture wars began when Chick-fil-A president Dan Cathy told the Baptist Press that the company was "guilty as charged" for backing "the biblical definition of a family." In a later radio interview, he ratcheted up the rhetoric: "I think we are inviting God's judgment on our nation when we shake our fist at him and say, 'We know better than you as to what constitutes a marriage.'" That fired up gay rights advocates, including a group that waged a campaign against the company in recent years by publicizing \$3 million in contributions that the Cathy family foundation has made to conservative organizations such as the Family Research Council. "This solidifies Chick-fil-A as being closely aligned with some of the most vicious anti-gay voices in the country," said Carlos Maza of Equality Matters. A Chicago alderman vowed to block a Chick-fil-A proposed in his district, and Mayor Rahm Emanuel supported him, saying, "Chick-fil-A values are not Chicago values." Boston Mayor Thomas Menino wrote in a letter to Cathy: "There is no place for discrimination on Boston's Freedom Trail and no place for your company alongside it." In announcing it was pulling its toys, the Jim Henson company said it has "celebrated and embraced diversity for over 50 years." It directed its revenue from the Chick-fil-A toys to GLAAD, a leading gay rights organization.

It would appear that because of where we are and the direction we are going, our nation will not be able to anticipate God's continual blessing and preservation of our nation's stature, prosperity, or security. God appears to have also "given us up

God declares that homosexual relations are the manifestation of "*dishonourable passions*" (1:26). Women and men who embrace that way of living, God declares that they "exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature" and that they are "consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error" (Rom. 1:26-27).

What is the due penalty for their error?

The "error" recompensed by abandonment to these unnatural vices is the apostasy from the worship of God described in verses 21-23, 25 and the recompense itself consists, to use Shedd's words, in "the gnawing unsatisfied lust itself, together with the dreadful physical and moral consequences of debauchery." In the apostle's delineation of the moral squalor we must discover a conspicuous example of the wrath of God revealed from heaven (vs.. 18). And the degeneracy invoices the degradation which follows in the wake of idolatrous worship. The proprieties which our own nature would dictate are shameful desecrated and "we become blind at noonday."⁷

(3) God gave them up to "*a debased mind to do what ought not to be done*" (1:28).

This is the third instance in this passage in which Paul declared that "God gave them up" to their sin.

⁷ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1965), p. 48.

²⁸And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³²Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

This third occasion is slightly different than the previous two. One described Paul's words in this way:

For the third time Paul describes God's response to people's spurning of him with the words "God gave them over" (cf. vv. 24, 26). Whereas in the previous instances it was to immoral acts that God consigned people, in this case it is to a "worthless mind." People who have refused to acknowledge God end up with minds that are "disqualified" from being able to understand and acknowledge the will of God. The result, of course, is that they do things that are "not proper." As in 1:21, Paul stresses that people who have turned from God are fundamentally unable to think and decide correctly about God and his will. This tragic incapacity is the explanation for biblical ethical principles. Only the work of the Spirit in "renewing the mind" (Rom. 12:2) can overcome this deep-seated blindness and perversity.⁸

In these verses many more sins are listed as the consequence of idolatrous thinking and practice. They are as follows:

1. all manner of unrighteousness,
2. evil,
3. covetousness,
4. malice
5. They are full of envy,
6. murder,
7. strife,
8. deceit,
9. maliciousness.
10. They are gossips,
11. slanderers,
12. haters of God,
13. insolent,
14. haughty,
15. boastful,
16. inventors of evil,
17. disobedient to parents,
18. foolish,
19. faithless,
20. heartless,
21. ruthless.

This list is commonly referred to as a "vice list." Paul has several of these lists in his writings.⁹ Paul is not identifying specific sins that were uniquely common to those in Rome. Rather, he provides this litany of sins to show that all sin is the result of people failing to know and worship the true God. "The list is a general and wide-ranging depiction of human sin."¹⁰

⁸ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1996), p. 118.

⁹ Cf. 1 Corinthians 5:10-11; 6:9-10; 2 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 4:31; 5:3-5; Colossians 3:5, 8; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; 6:4-5; 2 Timothy 3:2-4; Titus 3:3.

¹⁰ Schreiner, p. 97.

The list itself may be regarded as having three parts. The *first* begins with the participle translated “all manner of” in the ESV, but perhaps better translated “they were filled with all manner of.” This phrase is connected to the first four “vices”—unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. These all have a similar sound in that they end with the Greek vowels “ai” (transliterated in English). The words in Greek are: **ἀδικία** , **πονηρία** , **πλεονεξία** , **κακία**. The *second* part of the list are modified by the word translated, “They are full of.” There are five of these words, translated as envy, murder, strife, deceit, and maliciousness. The *third* part contains 12 words. The first two speak of the man or woman that attempts to destroy another’s reputation—gossips and slanderers. And then four words that describe their sin in shocking terms-- haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful. Several sins that are described by two words are cited—inventors of evil, disobedient to parents. Sinners are creative in the ways that they sin. Sin causes the disruption of family relationships—“disobedient to parents.” The last four words all begin with the Greek letter “a”—**ἀσυνέτους ἀσυνθέτους ἀστόργους ἀνελεήμονας**.

Paul concludes this section stating that these people know intuitively that they deserve God’s punishment for their sin. **Verse 32a** reads, **“Though they know God’s decree that those who practice such things deserve to die.”** God has placed in the soul of every human being knowledge of His law that condemns them when they sin. People know better, even though they try to deny or dismiss their culpability.

And then lastly, Paul declares that not only the ones who do these things are worthy of death, but those who would excuse or encourage them in their behavior are also deserving of God’s severe punishment. “They not only do them but give approval to those who practice them” (1:32). When those commit the actual sins, they may have done so out of temptation and compulsion. But the ones who approve or promote such behavior are under no such compulsion. They seem to be shown to be more culpable than the ones who are doing these things.

He (Cranfield) notes correctly that the person who commits evil, even though his or her actions are inexcusable can at least plead the mitigating circumstances of the passion of the moment. Those who encourage others to practice evil do so from a settled and impassioned conviction.¹¹

Let me conclude on this note: Let us remember that these words of Paul are designed to prove that all people everywhere are in need of Jesus Christ alone as Lord and Savior. In all of our speaking about these matters of sin today, it is not with the desire or design to humiliate or marginalize people. First of all, because all people are created in the image of God, we purpose to regard them and treat them with dignity and respect, even though their own sin is aggravated because of their noble identify and calling and yet have chosen to degrade themselves.

But most of all, we desire the salvation of all peoples. We want the forgiveness of sin by God, their deliverance from sinning through faith and Jesus Christ and through the power that He is able to give to His people. The great prerequisite to salvation, however, is to recognize and acknowledge sin to be sin, as God sees it, before His remedy will be sought and received. And so, we will continue to proclaim it to be so, and we will be willing to endure the heat and hostility for doing so, for we care about the well-being of their eternal souls.

Lastly, let us reaffirm that these more egregious forms of sin are not unpardonable. Paul wrote of the Christians in the church at Corinth:

⁹Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:9-11)

¹¹ Ibid., p. 100.